

Assistant Secretary Esther Brimmer

Remarks Before the Ministerial Meeting at the Alliance of Civilizations Rio Forum

Friday, May 28, 2010 -- Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

- Secretary General Ban, President Sampaio, Ministers, and Heads of Delegation,
- On behalf the United States I want to thank the government of Brazil for hosting the Third Forum of the Alliance of Civilization this year in Rio de Janeiro.
- We also want to thank Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan for their leadership in starting and sustaining this initiative, and President Sampaio and the members of the Group of Friends for so warmly welcoming us into the Alliance of Civilizations.
- It is an honor and a privilege to address the Ministerial Meeting of Group of Friends on this important occasion.
- In joining, we recognize the value of the Alliance of Civilizations as an important initiative seeking to improve mutual understanding, dialogue and cooperation between cultures and peoples across the globe.
- We also embrace the possibilities of the Alliance of Civilizations to serve as a vehicle for human progress and change, uniting us behind our common aspiration for a peaceful and prosperous future, and lowering the walls of indifference, ignorance, and intolerance that can separate us.
- It is particularly important that we are here today to work collectively as we seek to forge common ground and create a 21st century forum for international dialogue and cooperation.
- As President Obama expressed in his speech in Cairo last June, the United States seeks to build cooperation based upon mutual interest and mutual respect. To that end, we are dedicated to working with other nations who share our commitment to cross-cultural dialogue and seek to build a shared future based on understanding, tolerance and respect.
- We appreciate that the Alliance provides opportunities, not just for governments, but also for individuals, educational institutions, and a myriad of civil society organizations – large and small -- to create enduring grassroots networks that foster dialogue and encourage far-reaching projects in the areas of youth, education, media, and migration.
- Given the challenges and opportunities that we face internationally it is vitally important, it is a necessity, that we find creative ways to open the door to new ideas and best practices as we work together on these themes.
- The Alliance of Civilizations facilitates the sharing of innovative ideas and successful approaches that participants have or will implement on their own or in conjunction with other like-minded partners.
- The United States is pleased to join the innovative, inclusive approach of the Alliance which brings together different cultures from across the globe.
- The United States has long been a convener and catalyst for cross-cultural dialogue, bringing together diverse nations and people creating conditions and opportunities that allow for mutual understanding, partnership and progress to flourish.
- Indeed, the United States places a great value on its own history of leadership and commitment to international exchange and training programs. We have been conducting international educational,

cultural and citizen exchanges for decades to promote dialogue, build trust, and improve mutual understanding and cross-cultural cooperation.

- Americans from all walks of life, through schools and universities, religious groups of all faiths, youth groups, and other organizations, have been the bedrock of our efforts to build lasting ties with peoples and nations around the world.
- In fact, several American academic institutions and non-governmental organizations have already established ties or informal relations with the Alliance of Civilizations.
- These critical programs that foster mutual understanding serve as concrete vehicles for cross-cultural cooperation and have a lasting impact.
- In joining the Alliance, the United States recognizes the importance of the United Nations in building trust, reconciliation, and mutual respect among diverse communities globally.
- We are working with the United Nations, for example through UNESCO, supporting international academic and scientific cooperation, networking of institutions and promoting diversity and cultural dialogue.
- We welcome the Memorandum of Understanding the Alliance has signed with UNESCO, an arrangement that undoubtedly will deepen cooperation, as well as build on ongoing efforts to promote connections and commonalities between civilizations and nations.
- We know that dialogue alone may not be enough to resolve difficult problems, nor do we expect that cross-cultural exchanges or people to people engagement will necessarily resolve historic differences or heartfelt grievances.
- But we do believe in the benefits of common understanding that inter-cultural dialogue can bring—whether it is a South African coming to the Western Hemisphere to collaborate on a project for the first time; or a new online community where teenagers or college students in Asia and Europe can share and exchange thoughts, experiences and plans for action, or whether it is an American studying abroad with peers from the Middle East.
- Through dialogue, engagement and exchange it is our hope that previously held misconceptions are overcome, leading to greater understanding and appreciation of the global community we all inhabit. We also hope it leads to the realization that the so-called "other" shares more in common with us than not.
- That is why we strongly believe that frank, open and respectful dialogue can serve to foster peaceful engagement and understanding, creating the necessary space for greater cooperation and a more prosperous future for all of us.
- The United States decision to join the Alliance was reached based on a clear and hopeful vision of what can be accomplished here and across the globe.
- We look forward to working with the Alliance of Civilizations and the international community to help create new possibilities for understanding.
- Thank you.